

Concept note

Second Regional Conference on Women's Empowerment in Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean

Promoting women's leadership and entrepreneurship.

San Salvador, El Salvador
24-26 November 2025

I. Background

Tourism is one of the main economic engines of Latin America and the Caribbean, and women represent an essential pillar of this sector. In the region, women make up 52% of the tourism workforce, and their participation is even more significant in the accommodation and food service subsectors, where they account for an average of 60% regionally and exceed 70% in Central America.

Women constitute the majority of tourism workers, a trend expected to rise, as 69% of students pursuing tourism-related degrees are women. Likewise, Latin America and the Caribbean stand out as the most entrepreneurial region in the world, with 33% of women expressing an intention to start a business and 21% having already created or being in the process of launching their own venture.

Despite many positive trends, the region still faces persistent challenges that limit the full professional development of women in tourism, such as restricted access to financing, low representation in leadership positions, and the digital divide. Added to this is violence against women, which affects both workers in the sector and tourists, constituting one of the main obstacles to women's empowerment. Eliminating all these barriers is essential to ensure that women can fully benefit from the economic opportunities the sector offers and enjoy safe spaces within their communities.

Given its great potential to generate livelihoods and autonomy, the tourism sector has historically represented a key opportunity for women's empowerment. As a specialized agency of the United Nations, UN Tourism is committed to ensuring that tourism development contributes to improving women's lives and, in doing so, advances the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with special emphasis on SDG 5: "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls."

In Latin America and the Caribbean, several countries have made progress in this direction, with El Salvador standing out for its programs. The Ministry of Public Works and Transportation and the Ministry of Tourism have developed the Policy on Equality, Equity, and a Life Free from Violence for Women, which seeks to promote equity through tourism infrastructure projects, capacity building, and institutional strengthening in the transport and tourism sectors. These actions ensure equitable working environments for women workers, promote internal awareness, and foster gender-balanced proposals throughout the tourism value chain.

Among other initiatives, the *Digi-Chiquihuites* project, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Tourism of El Salvador, the Salvadoran Tourism Institute (ISTU), and the Salvadoran Institute of Teacher Welfare (ISBM), aims to implement a digital toolkit to reduce the digital divide and promote financial inclusion, especially for women entrepreneurs and microbusiness owners in recreational parks and tourist sites nationwide. Similarly, the “*Women Free from Violence in Public Transport*” initiative, promoted by the Government in collaboration with UNDP and UN Women, seeks to reduce sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women, ensuring safe mobility for workers and visitors in tourist destinations.

In this context, the **2nd Regional Conference on Women’s Empowerment in Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean** will be held. This event, following the successful 1st Regional Conference on the Empowerment of Women in Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean held in Asunción in 2024, aims to continue the dialogue initiated there and highlight the importance of women’s role in the sector. At the same time, it promotes the adoption of effective measures to advance strategies and policies for women’s empowerment in the region, foster their leadership, and contribute to equitable tourism growth.

II. Sessions

High level Panel: “Women Who Drive the Economy: Female Leadership in Tourism”

Highlighting the role of women in the tourism sector and showcasing policies that have contributed to women’s empowerment and the development of an inclusive and safe tourism sector.

The public sector plays a key role in reducing equality gaps. To promote the empowerment of women in the tourism sector, it is essential to implement specific public policies and foster coordinated actions among different institutions.

The High-Level Panel will address some of the most effective measures the public sector can adopt to increase the visibility and participation of women in tourism:

- **Design policies that promote women’s economic autonomy and reduce their vulnerability**, strengthening their participation as professionals and entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.
- **Develop public awareness campaigns on gender equality and training programs aimed at society as a whole**, with special emphasis on the tourism sector.
- **Promote gender parity in leadership positions within the tourism sector** through capacity-building programs, mentorship networks led by women leaders, and policies that ensure equality in recruitment and decision-making processes.
- **Ensure equal pay and opportunities in public employment** by fostering equitable working conditions and increasing women’s participation in decision-making roles within tourism-related institutions.
- **Incorporate training processes focused on digitalization and the participation of women in international markets**, supporting the reduction of digital gaps and fostering informed and equitable participation in global markets.

The panel aims to highlight the progress made by participating countries toward women's empowerment in the tourism sector, showcasing key initiatives as well as the main challenges and opportunities. It will also discuss actions to build a more inclusive and equitable tourism sector, promoting gender equality as a central pillar for the development of tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Panel 1: Safe Destinations and Workplaces for All

Analysis of the measures implemented by the private sector to make tourist destinations safe spaces for both visitors and women working in the sector.

Within the framework of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, proclaimed by the UN in 1999, the panel will explore policies and strategies that enable companies to create safe, equitable, and inclusive environments where women can fully participate in all activities within the tourism sector.

The private sector plays a key role in countering violence against women, both within and beyond the workplace. Adopting policies and practices that promote gender equality and prevent all forms of violence generates benefits for both companies and their employees.

Through collaboration with civil society organizations and participation in initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, companies can make a significant contribution to building a safer and more equitable tourism sector. This requires adopting zero-tolerance policies, establishing confidential reporting and support protocols, and providing comprehensive assistance to women who are victims of violence. Additionally, promoting these actions is also essential for customers, as it allows them to understand the measures in place and enjoy tourism services in a safe, informed, and free manner.

Ensuring equal pay and opportunities within the company, promoting continuous staff training and development, and implementing codes of conduct and safety protocols are essential pillars for creating safe and respectful work environments.

Presentation of Successful Entrepreneurship Strategies in the Tourism Sector

Presentation and testimonials on successful women-led entrepreneurship experiences and strategies in the tourism sector of El Salvador – in coordination with various stakeholders and agencies of the United Nations system, international organizations, and multilateral banks – as well as other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Women's entrepreneurship in Latin America and the Caribbean is a key economic driver in the region. Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) represent 99% of the formal business sector, highlighting their central role in job creation and economic development. In the tourism sector, women's entrepreneurship is primarily concentrated in these businesses, with an estimated 70% of women working in tourism employed in enterprises with fewer than five people.

Despite their importance, women entrepreneurs continue to face significant challenges, such as limited access to financing, the digital divide, and the need for greater participation in sectors like technology and innovation.

In this context, prominent women entrepreneurs in tourism will take centre stage in this segment of the conference, sharing their experiences and the strategies that have driven the success of their businesses. Their testimonies will illustrate the journey from initial challenges to the consolidation of their achievements, providing concrete examples and best practices that will serve as inspiration and learning for the conference audience.

Workshop: “The Future of Tourism is Female: Women-Led Businesses Towards the International Market”

The workshop aims to provide women in the region with the necessary tools to guide their businesses toward international markets.

The workshop aims to provide women in the region with the tools to project and expand their businesses into international markets. It will be conducted using a practical, experiential methodology, based on learning from real experiences and successful cases of women’s entrepreneurship. The goal is to strengthen the capacities of tourism MSMEs, promoting a vision that enables them to adapt, innovate, and compete in the international environment.

The training seeks to enhance the preparedness and resilience of businesses in the face of global market challenges, while also encouraging the adoption of best practices, collaboration among women entrepreneurs, and the creation of support networks. The workshop will cover the key stages of designing and implementing internationalization strategies, providing tools for MSMEs to diversify their operations, expand their customer base, increase revenue, and establish themselves as more inclusive, sustainable, and multicultural businesses.

Conclusions and recommendations

The **2nd Regional Conference on Women’s Empowerment in Tourism in Latin America and the Caribbean** aims to strengthen the participation and leadership of women in the region’s tourism sector.

The Conference seeks to promote public policies, best practices, and successful entrepreneurship strategies, as well as to ensure inclusive and supportive spaces where women can fully develop their aspirations and creativity. Additionally, it aims to provide an open forum for the exchange of ideas, experiences, and opportunities among participants.

At the conclusion of the Conference, strategic recommendations will be presented to promote gender equality in the tourism sector, strengthen women’s empowerment and leadership, and ensure that they can fully benefit from their participation in tourism activities.